

Message Text

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AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
DIA WASHDC
USCINCSO J2 QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ
AMEMBASSY MADRID

C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 6278

FOR TURBAY INAUGURATION DEL.

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, PGOV, BL
SUBJECT: PEREDA AT THE CROSSROADS

1. SUMMARY: AFTER TWO WEEKS IN POWER, THE GOVERNMENT OF JUAN PEREDA HAS ALREADY REACHED A CRITICAL CROSSROADS. AFTER HIS ATTEMPT TO ENLIST THE SUPPORT OF VICTOR PAZ ESTENSSORO'S MNR-PRA ALLIANCE AND RENE BERNAL'S CHRISTIAN DEMOCRATS (PDC) FAILED, THESE GROUPS, AS WELL AS HERNAN SILES ZUAZO'S UDP COALITION, DEMANDED GENERAL ELECTIONS WITHIN A PERIOD OF SIX MONTHS TO ONE YEAR. PEREDA TRIED TO ACCOMMODATE OPPOSITION CONCERNS BY FLOATING THE POSSIBILITY OF ELECTIONS WITHIN 18 MONTHS. THIS FORMULA, HOWEVER, DID NOT ALLAY STRAINS WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES, HIS ONLY REAL CONSTITUENCY. TROUBLED BY CONTINUING DISSESION IN THE RANKS, HE WAS FORCED TO CANCEL A COMMANDER' MEETING SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST 1, AND IS CURRENTLY TOURING KEY
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REGIONAL GARRISONS IN SEARCH OF A MILITARY CONSENSUS. AFTER EVALUATING HIS OPTIONS, WE EXPECT PEREDA TO PRESENT A DEMOCRATIZATION FORMULA ON AUGUST 6, BOLIVIA'S NATIONAL HOLIDAY.
END SUMMARY.

2. WHEN HE SEIZED POWER ON JULY 21, PEREDA TRIED TO PERSUADE ELEMENTS OF PAZ' MNR-PRA ALLIANCE AND BERNAL'S

PDC TO JOIN WITH HIM TO FORM A GOVERNMENT OF UNITY. AFTER THIS ATTEMPT FAILED, HE WAS FORCED TO PUT TOGETHER A CABINET CONSISTING LARGELY OF PARTY HACKS FROM THE UNP COALITION AND MILITARY OFFICERS TO WHOM HE WAS POLITICALLY INDEBTED. FROM THE OUTSET, PEREDA HAS LEFT MOST CABINET MEMBERS OUT OF THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS. HIS INNER CIRCLE OF ADVISORS IS LIMITED TO JAVIER ARCE, COMMERCE MINISTER EDWIN TAPIA (WHO WILL ACCOMPANY HIM TO BOGOTA) AND INTERIOR MINISTER FAUSTINO RICO TORO.

3. SHORTLY AFTER THE COUP, ALMOST ALL THE OPPOSITION GROUPS BEGAN TO CLAMOR FOR NEW ELECTIONS. SILES ZUAZO'S UDP DEMANDED A RETURN TO DEMOCRATIC RULE BEFORE 1979; THIS POSITION WAS SHARED BY THE FAR LEFT QUIROGA SANTA CRUZ SOCIALIST PARTY, AND LATER ADOPTED BY THE PDC AND THE GUTIERREZ-WING OF THE FSB. THE MNR CALLED FOR GENERAL ELECTIONS WITHIN ONE YEAR. WHILE THESE DEMANDS WERE BEING FORMULATED, PEREDA BEGAN TO REALIZE THAT HIS INITIAL INCLINATION TO GOVERN FOR FOUR YEARS WAS UNREALISTIC. AT THE INVESTITURE OF HIS CABINET ON JULY 24, HE THEREFORE PLEDGED TO CONTINUE THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS SET IN MOTION BY THE BANZER GOVERNMENT. A FEW DAYS LATER, PEREDA FLOUTED WITH NEW YORK TIMES CORRESPONDENT JUAN DE ONIS THE POSSIBILITY OF GENERAL ELECTIONS WITHIN 18 MONTHS. IN SUBSEQUENT INTERVIEWS WITH AP AND UPI, HE ALSO HINTED AT THE POSSIBILITY OF A RAPID RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT.

4. ALTHOUGH SOME OPPOSITION MEMBERS PRIVATELY REGARDED PEREDA'S
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REMARKS TO THE PRESS AS A POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT, THEIR PUBLIC POSITIONS REMAINED OBDURATE. THEN, AS PEREDA BEGAN TO WEIGH HIS NEXT MOVE, HE WAS SUDDENLY BESET BY DISSENSION IN HIS OWN CONSTITUENCY, THE ARMED FORCES.

5. TENSIONS WITHIN THE MILITARY HAD BEEN INCREASING STEADILY SINCE THE PEREDA COUP BEGAN. MANY IN THE ARMY, BY FAR THE LARGEST OF BOLIVIA'S THREE SERVICES, RESENTED THE PIVOTAL ROLE PLAYED BY THE AIR FORCE. THEY ALSO FELT HUMILIATED BY THE AIR FORCE'S APPARENT TACTICAL ASCENDENCY DURING THE CRUCIAL AFTERNOON HOURS OF JULY 21. PERHAPS MORE IMPORTANT THAN THE DIVISIONS ALONG SERVICE LINES, HOWEVER, WERE THE DIFFERING ATTITUDES TOWARD DEMOCRATIZATION. SOME OFFICERS BELIEVED THAT PEREDA, INsofar AS HE REPRESENTED THE ARMED FORCES, SHOULD GOVERN FOR FOUR YEARS. OTHERS, WHO HAVE BEEN DUBBED "INSTITUTIONALISTS", WERE CONCERNED ABOUT FURTHER DEBILITATION OF THEIR PUBLIC IMAGE, AND PREFERRED A MORE RAPID RETURN TO CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT. THE MAJORITY OF THIS LATTER GROUP, HOWEVER, WOULD PROBABLY PREFER NEW ELECTIONS NEARER THE 18 MONTH DATE THAN EARLIER DEADLINES SET BY THE OPPOSITION PARTIES.

6. THESE DIFFERING VIEWS WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES BECAME

DRAMATICALLY APPARENT WHEN PEREDA WAS FORCED TO CANCEL A LARGE AND SMALL UNIT COMMANDERS' MEETING SCHEDULED FOR AUGUST 1. THE PURPOSE OF THE MEETING, WHICH HAD RECEIVED WIDE PUBLICITY, WAS TO EVALUATE THE GOALS OF THE PEREDA GOVERNMENT. INITIAL REPORTS ATTRIBUTED THE CANCELLATION TO DIFFICULTIES IN THE LA PAZ UNITS, WHICH HAD BEEN THE PRINCIPAL ONES TO OPPOSE THE PEREDA TAKEOVER. WE LATER LEARNED, HOWEVER, THAT THERE WAS DISSENSION IN THE REGIONAL GARRISONS AS WELL. IN AN EFFORT TO ACHIEVE A CONSENSUS, PEREDA RESORTED TO THE OLD BANZER TACTIC OF VISITING KEY UNITS PERSONALLY. HE STARTED IN LA PAZ, THEN PROCEEDED TO COCHABAMBA AND SANTA CRUZ. PEREDA IS SCHEDULED TO RETURN TO THE CAPITAL ON AUGUST 5. AT THAT TIME, HE AND HIS CLOSEST ADVISORS ARE EXPECTED TO EVALUATE THE RESULTS OF THE TRIP, AND DECIDE ON A DEMOCRATIZATION FORMULA. AT LEAST SOME ELEMENTS OF
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THIS FORMULA SHOULD BE DISCLOSED IN PEREDA'S AUGUST 6 NATIONAL DAY ADDRESS.

7. WHATEVER THEY DECIDE, IT WILL NOT PLEASE ALL BOLIVIANS. NO FORMULA CAN SATISFY BOTH THE MILITARY HARDLINERS, WHO FAVOR FOUR MORE YEARS OF DE FACTO GOVERNMENT, AND INTRACTABLE LEFTIST OPPOSITION ELEMENT WHO WANT ELECTIONS BY THE END OF THE YEAR. PEREDA WILL PROBABLY OPT FOR ELECTIONS IN LATE 1979 AS THE BEST FORMULA TO ENGAGE THE COOPERATION OF AT LEAST THE MILITARY "INSTITUTIONALISTS" AND THE CENTER TO CENTER-LEFT POLITICAL PARTIES.
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